

## **Minneapolis City Planning Department Report Zoning Code Text Amendment**

**Date:** May 12, 2003

**Initiator of Amendment:** Council Member Gary Schiff

**Date of Introduction at City Council:** April 18, 2003

**Specific Site (If Applicable):** The western portion of the Historic Mills District: The area bounded by Third Avenue South, Washington Avenue South, Tenth Avenue South, and the Mississippi River

**Ward: 2 Neighborhood Organization:** Downtown Minneapolis Neighborhood Association and the Industry Square Project Committee

**Planning Staff and Phone:** Jack Byers, (612) 673-2634

**Existing Zoning (If Applicable):** C3A-Community Activity Center District, DH-Downtown Height Overlay, and DP-Downtown Parking Overlay

**Intent of the Ordinance:** The intent of the proposed text amendment is to allow projects of a specific kind and scale to seek a variance for roof signs in a specific district of the city that already has roof signs as an integral part of the district's physical and historical environment.

**Appropriate Section(s) of the Zoning Code:** Chapter 543: On-Premise Signs; Chapter 551 Overlay Districts

### **Background:**

*Past, Present, and Future:* The Historic Mills District in Downtown Minneapolis is a critical element in the city's history as well as its future. Built on the banks of the Mississippi River adjacent to St. Anthony Falls, the milling district is well known for its role in forging the local commercial/industrial economy. The complex of mills and rail yards was built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and formed the foundation for Minneapolis as the economic capital of the Upper Midwest.

While technological advancements rendered most of the facilities in this part of the city obsolete by the middle of the twentieth century, it is notable that many of the corporations that took root in this location became major benefactors who helped to establish a thriving cultural community in Minneapolis and across Minnesota.

## Minneapolis City Planning Department Report

In an effort to recast the obsolete industrial district, the City has looked toward the future by revitalizing this district as a new mixed-use neighborhood that combines residential, commercial, and recreational/cultural uses. The redevelopment of the historic structures in this neighborhood has been the catalyst for new development that fills in the urban fabric on land that was once a wide swath of rail yards. As such, the sensitive integration of the historic and contemporary fabric of the neighborhood is paramount.

*Roof Signs on the Mississippi River:* A key component of the commercial/industrial history of Minneapolis is the soaring roof signs that dot the riverbanks nearby St. Anthony Falls. While they were originally intended as advertisement, over the decades, these signs have become vivid reminders of the roots and purpose of the city that grew up around these businesses. Three notable examples are still in place: The Gold Medal Flour sign, the Northstar Blanket Mill sign, and the Pillsbury A Mill sign. Newer additions have been added in recent years including the roof signs on River Place and St. Anthony Main. Most recently, new roof signs have been installed at the Mill City Museum.

*The Challenge:* The City's Code of Ordinances prohibits roof signs throughout the City. Moreover, it does not allow developers and applicants the ability to seek a variance of that prohibition. (It should be noted that properties within the St. Anthony Falls Historic District are eligible for historic variance pursuant to the City's historic preservation regulation).

Understandably, the City's Code of Ordinances is written to cover a wide set of circumstances that need to be considered in relation to contemporary development throughout the entire corporate boundaries of the City.

The challenge is that the existing chapter concerning on-premises signs does not allow developers and applicants the ability to seek a variance for projects located within the Mills District but outside of the St. Anthony Falls Historic District. This mismatch undermines the sort of creativity necessary to sensitively integrate the physical fabric of new and old within various parts of the Historic Mills District.

### **Purpose for the Amendment:**

The purpose of the amendment is to allow applicants to pursue a sign adjustment for roof signs for projects within the Historic Mills Districts for projects that are non-residential in use and meet set threshold requirements for scale and size of development.

### **What is the reason for the amendment?**

The reason for the amendment is to allow developers and applicants the ability to seek an adjustment for roof signs if they demonstrate creativity in the design of new structures that recognize and sensitively integrate the intended future of the district while simultaneously honoring the district's past.

**What problem is the Amendment designed to solve?**

The amendment is intended to allow applicants to seek a variance in specific circumstances where a variance is not currently allowed.

**What public purpose will be served by the amendment?**

The amendment will allow applicants to exercise creativity in meeting the City's objectives for developing new structures within the Historic Mills District (but outside of the St. Anthony Falls Historic District) that recognize and sensitively integrate the intended future of the district while simultaneously honoring the district's past.

**What problems might the amendment create?**

If the amendment is not crafted with language that specifies use, size, location, and purpose of the project, it may easily be misconstrued by developers and applicants pursuing projects in other parts of the City.

The Planning Department believes that the creation of the amendment, and the granting of variances that meet the requirements of the amendment will be in keeping with the spirit and intent of the Code of Ordinances and will not be injurious to the use or enjoyment of other property in the district.

**Timeliness:**

**Is the amendment timely?**

The amendment is particularly timely in that the City has invested, and continues to invest, significant resources toward the preservation, redevelopment, and revitalization of the Historic Mills District. It should be noted that the City Planning Commission and the City Council adopted a small area plan for this area in 2001. The specific intention the *Update to the Historic Mills District Master Plan* is to set the framework for the creative and sensitive integration of new development in the district while simultaneously honoring the district's past.

**Is the amendment consistent with practices in surrounding areas?**

The proposed amendment is intended to allow applicants the ability to apply for a variance that, if approved, will grant them the ability to erect roof signs. Therefore it will be the means through which applicants can pursue creative strategies to provide physical structures, particularly roof signs, which will make projects more consistent with the immediate surroundings in the district.

**Are there consequences in denying this amendment?**

Denying this amendment will prohibit applicants from applying for variances for roof signs in parts of the Historic Mills District that are not within the St. Anthony Falls Historic District. Denying this amendment would inhibit the creativity of applicants seeking to meet the City's objectives for developing new projects in the Historic Mills District in a way that recognizes the intended future of the district while simultaneously honoring the district's past.

**Comprehensive Plan:**

**How will this amendment implement the Comprehensive Plan?**

The proposed text amendment will support and help to implement the following principals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan:

- “Downtown is a Very Special Place... Downtown will contain an enriching variety of historic buildings and the finest contemporary architecture, with a skyline that continues to serve as a source of civic pride.” (*Downtown 2010*: Physical Settings Chapter, Introduction).
- “Promote building heights and designs that protect the image and form of the downtown skyline, that provide transition to the edges of downtown and that protect the scale and qualities in areas of distinctive physical or historic character.” (*Downtown 2010*: Physical Settings Chapter, Policy 7).
- “Improve physical and visual access to the riverfront: The riverfront is downtown's largest open space and cultural amenity. The riverfront includes the West River Parkway, Stone Arch Bridge and various historic mills and warehouses that represent the City's past and economic roots. Currently, the large area of cleared land acts as a barrier between the riverfront and downtown. The remoteness of the river can be alleviated as adjacent properties are developed by extending the street grid to the parkway to connect this important resource to the rest of downtown.” (*Downtown 2010*: Physical Settings Chapter, Policy 13).
- “Preserve, restore and reuse historic buildings and sites in Downtown.” (*Downtown 2010*: Physical Settings Chapter, Policy 16).
- “Support the retention of historic properties in publicly assisted redevelopment projects in downtown.” (*Downtown 2010*: Physical Settings Chapter, Policy 17).
- “Encourage new buildings adjacent to historic buildings, sites and districts to be compatible in design.” (*Downtown 2010*: Physical Settings Chapter, Policy 18).

## Minneapolis City Planning Department Report

### Proposed Language:

**551.855. Roof signs.** Notwithstanding any other provision to the contrary, on-premise roof signs may be allowed on nonresidential, multiple story buildings containing at least one hundred thousand (100,000) square feet of gross floor area located within the area bounded by Tenth Avenue South, Washington Avenue South, Third Avenue South and the Mississippi River, when approved as a sign adjustment pursuant to Chapter 543, On-Premise Signs, and Chapter 525, Administration and Enforcement.

### Recommendation of The City Planning Department:

The City Planning Department recommends that the City Planning Commission and City Council adopt the above findings and **approve** the text amendment.

Ordinance  
by Schiff

### **Amending Title 20, Chapter 551 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances relating to the Zoning Code: Overlay Districts.**

The City Council of The City of Minneapolis do ordain as follows:

Section 1. That Chapter 551 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances be amended by adding thereto a new Section 551.855 to read as follows:

**551.855. Roof signs.** Notwithstanding any other provision to the contrary, on-premise roof signs may be allowed on nonresidential, multiple story buildings containing at least one hundred thousand (100,000) square feet of gross floor area located within the area bounded by Tenth Avenue South, Washington Avenue South, Third Avenue South and the Mississippi River, when approved as a sign adjustment pursuant to Chapter 543, On-Premise Signs, and Chapter 525, Administration and Enforcement.